

The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." (Mark 6: 30-31) The apostles, those who were sent out by Jesus in pairs to various villages to teach and heal have returned. The word apostles, means *sent out*. It is the first time that the word apostles is used for the disciples of Jesus. They have been very busy teaching others what Jesus has taught them and bringing healing to those who were sick. Now Jesus tells them that it is time to, *"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."* Rest a while, but they have been busy doing the work of the kingdom of God, people have been healed! Go off to a deserted place by themselves? That's the last thing they probably wanted to do. Let's have a party, celebrate being together again after traveling to different villages. Share with each other and tell our friends and family what has happened. Come away and rest awhile? Jesus, why would we do that, the disciples may have been thinking. I image that we would react the same way as those first disciples. Come away and rest awhile? But we just got back, we want to celebrate share our stories with each other. Even today we want people to look how busy we are, how much good we've done for others! Come on Jesus tell us what a great job we have done in your Name. We don't want to go off by ourselves to a deserted place, what good will that do anyone?

Let's take a look at the beginning of Jesus own ministry. What happened right after he had called his first disciples and gone to Peter's house for dinner and healed Peter's mother-in-law? *That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. . . . In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.* (Mark 1:32-35) Jesus heals those who came to him and then goes off to a deserted place to pray. The word for "deserted place" in Greek is *eremos* the same word that is used in this morning's passage. Jesus is telling his disciples that they need to take time to be alone with God to take Sabbath time to restore themselves. I agree with the Franciscan monk and author Richard Rohr when he says, "Sabbath [time] is the regular disengagement from a system that uses us up to the point of exhaustion." Jesus knows that he needs time away to just be with God for his own well-being and those he serves. In today's culture it is what we would call part of a healthy lifestyle.

In American culture being busy is a sign of success, but it is not necessarily a good attribute of our culture. We often identify ourselves by our profession. People usually ask, "so what do you do?" when we are introduced to someone. We are the beloved of God, but too often we perceive ourselves through the filter of our work, what we have accomplished, what we do, rather than who we truly are in God's sight. We too often value doing over being. We hate to 'waste time' but sometimes that is exactly what we are supposed to do! We are to 'just be' and be present to the moment, to a loved one, to the beauty in nature, to God. Stop and be still for a moment! Rest awhile and be present to God.

God wants us to take the time to be present to God, to notice what is happening in our lives. In this Diocese the priests are required to take an annual retreat. For years I have

taken the time each year for to go on an 8-Day Ignatian Retreat. It is a chance for me to spend time in silence, being alone while living in an intentional community for the week, away from the daily routine of life. As disciples of Jesus, we all need to take some time, even if it is only for a day to be present to the God who created and sustains us. The God who speaks to us in the silence of our hearts.

There is a story that God is tired of being pestered by people asking for this and for that, so God calls a meeting of the most trusted angels and asks for suggestions as to where one can hide from pestering people.

One angel advises God to hide on the highest peak of the highest mountain because no one will search there. Another angel says, “No, hide in the deepest ocean in the world and no one will search for you there.”

Finally, God turns to his most trusted angel and asks, “Where do you suggest I should hide?” And the angel responds, “Hide in the human heart! No one will search for you there.”¹

God hides in the stillness of our hearts as we get caught up in the busyness of our daily lives. Just as God was calling the first disciples to take some time away by themselves to reflect on all that had just happened in their lives as they were sent out by Jesus. They needed the healing power of God’s grace to nourish them just as much as they had healed others through God’s grace.

The pandemic this past year has drained all of us physically, emotionally and spiritually. Like the disciples we need time to rest and reflect on what has transpired in our lives this past year. Every time Jesus was involved in healing people, he took the time afterwards to be alone with God. Right after he began his ministry in Capernaum, *In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.* (Mark 1:35) While his disciples are out healing and teaching in the different villages, Jesus was resting alone. So when the disciples come back he is refreshed and ready to compassionately reach out to others. Luke tells us that *the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray.* (Luke 5:15-16)

If Jesus needed time away from the busyness of life to be nourished by God, don’t we as well? We need time to unplug, literally from our phones, our computers, the news and just be so that God can refresh us as well. It will all still be there when we return, but it is only after being recharged emotionally, physically and spiritually that we can then extend God’s healing grace to others in our lives.

¹ Tony deMello, SJ.

We, as followers of Jesus Christ, are sent out into our world to manifest the grace of God to our city, our neighbors. We do that by paying attention to how God is speaking to us in our hearts and then letting that experience shine forth through us to others. We take the time each Sunday to gather together and be nourished by God's Word and Christ's Body and Blood in the Eucharistic Feast. It is our weekly time away from the busyness of daily life to let Christ nourish us. God continues to call us all into healing and wholeness so that we can then be sent out into our broken world as apostles of Jesus Christ our Lord.